

(By: Russ Carnahan) A year ago I was proud to be a co-sponsor and among the majority of members of the United States House of Representatives who voted in favor of HR810, the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, which advances critical stem cell research guided by strict ethical controls. Such research holds the promise of cures for many diseases.

The collective sense of accomplishment at the time was profound among members, like myself, who successfully navigated this direly needed research expansion and funding to the House floor for passage. Democratic peers, joined by Republican colleagues across the aisle, set aside politics and agreed upon a way that high ethical standards, applied to stem cell research, could be imposed allowing additional stem lines to be readied for research and allowing research to proceed beyond the Bush Administration's restrictions.

The wait for the debilitated and incurable, makes a passing year seem like an eternity especially when science, ready to leap, is bound as a result of actions on the part of the Bush Administration and past inaction by the United States Senate. Meanwhile, millions of Americans in need stretch their hope and patience while trying their best every day to survive under the burden of life-altering diagnosis.

Science, not politics, should determine the future of this research. Certainly discussions played a significant part in the success we derived last year when bringing House lawmakers from all over the country together in addressing stem cell issues. As Christmas approached, there was real hope senators too might move needed research forward when Senate Majority Leader Frist, a doctor himself, indicated a willingness to proceed forward on some of the progress we had made earlier. In addition, most believe there is a bipartisan group in the Senate of well over sixty votes to pass this historic bill.

Winter for the infirmed has come and gone, and as spring has turned to summer, those among us with the most to lose still wait. Recognizing the magnitude of pressing issues facing our nation, and the dispatch afforded in their handling, my criticism of the Senate was replaced by bewilderment on how in dealing with other matters of urgency, when it came to stem cell research, the naming of three-hundred plus United States Post Offices could have proven to be a greater priority. Even now with the Senate poised for a vote, the White House waits with possible intentions to throw down its first veto.

Contrast that reluctance on the part of a few with more than a quarter of a million Missourians who this year alone signed onto petitions calling for a November statewide vote to protect the rights of patients to have their diseases and injuries treated with any stem cell cures or therapies that are allowed under federal law and available to other Americans. The ballot measure also ensures that scientists in our state can conduct ethical stem cell research and provide healthcare breakthroughs for the world and families across our nation in their greatest hour of need. Vast attention at home, like similar attention in Washington, demonstrates how the establishment of a dialogue based in science and supported by facts can best serve society and offer real promise for improving healthcare in America.

The collective well being of our people clearly depends upon responsible action not reprehensible delay. I urge all Missourians, families, organizations, institutions and businesses to press the U.S. Senate to pass the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act. As for the President, in his six years in office, President Bush has signed 1116 bills into law without vetoing a single one. Let's make sure he doesn't start.

The time to act on life saving cures is now.